Capstone Committee meeting, January 20, 2015

In attendance: Courtney Christopher, Heather Davis-Schmidt, Liz Colantuono, Caroline Lurgio, Beth Huguet, Shannon Pinkston , Lisa Moser, Sally Ann Chisholm, Joe Slemberger, Rhian Clark, Charlene Young, Brian Connelly

Meeting began: 3:15pm

1. Chair began with background information for ERD. Short-term and long-term goals of the committee and conversations around each. ERD asks, “What is your (this committee’s) vision for capstone?” Chair responds that is yet to be determined. Teacher responds: vision can be a multiple levels. ERD responds, “Set aside the original district vision, and describe what the HHS committee wants the vision to be for HHS.” A parent responds that we want a project without accountability in the English/Government classes. However we would like to have some kind of graduation requirement. ERD responds, that some of the reasons why the visions from the previous district committee (a graduation requirement) was not moved forward was because some schools didn’t do the work needed in their buildings to move acceptance of the district committee’s vision for capstone projects forward. She goes on to say:

* Capstone projects are part of the 21st Century Model of Education and the Achievement for all plans.
* Where the district has taken a step back is to work with each building leader (the principals) to determine what will capstone projects look like in their building.
* ERDs will work with each principal to determine what are some flexible options for students to complete the capstone project in your school. An example of SSHS was given the MYP personal project at the end of the 10th grade year.

1. Chair asks ERD, do you think the benchmark 2019 will include resource allocations? ERD answers that with many budgetary decisions, we have to prioritize our budgets. Chair asks how high of a priority are the capstone projects? ERD responds that this is a high priority. The Achievement for All plan doesn’t have that many benchmarks and this is one of them. The next steps for the district to move capstone projects forward is for the ERD and HS principals to meet in March 2015, and discuss how the next incoming freshman class of fall 2017, graduating cohort of 2021, expectations will be clearly communicated that a capstone project is a graduation requirement. The plan is to put it through OPI. Not sure at this time what that will look like, a .25 or .5 credit or what.
2. Parent asks how HHS can move forward if parents don’t want to wait until 2021 for students to be required to complete a capstone project.   
   (Assuming that SHS will continue to fight the initiative). ERD responds that she doesn’t assume that new administration at SHS will also fail to build consensus among the SHS community. The school board will not approve a change in graduation requirements until we have alignment/consensus between high schools.
3. Parent comments we need to talk about how we can have accountability at HHS. There has already been a pilot of non-accountability model and that was not successful. ERD ask, what kind of help do you feel you need. Teacher asks, can we create an equivalency of 23.5 credits plus project graduation requirement just for HHS graduates. ERD points to the example of the IB Diploma. Teacher says could we offer a support class, but it requires funding. ERD responds, what would you be willing to give up to reallocate funds to provide this support class? ERD responds that reallocating FTE is a building level decision. Parent clarifies, are you saying that we can make it a requirement. ERD responds if you want to be able to hold graduation for students until they complete a project, that the school board will not support that. Chair ask for a timeline, ERD restates that freshman entering high school in 2017 will be clearly communicated that to graduate in 2021 all students will need to complete a capstone project and that each building will determine what that looks like at their school.
4. Parent asks, what would be your recommendation for this committee to proceed. Parent clarifies that we may have several different pathways for students to complete projects if HHS creates a requirement and then the board changes the requirements down the road. She also points out that if HHS goes in one direction, as they did last year, then the program changes, we may have different requirements for different students. ERD, states that HHS did pilot a program that was agreed on by the district committee, however that doesn’t mean that the “grassroots,” agreed. Teacher clarifies that the district committee was representative of all school, and it feels that those agreements were not honored. Heather responds that she recognizes that the work of the district committee was not moved forward in all buildings. Therefore it is necessary that we (as a district) proceed differently this time and why we are starting with building leadership to build consensus for plans created at the building level instead of plans created by a district committee.
5. What if SHS doesn’t move forward? ERD responds that she has not been involved in conversation with SHS, but that starting with the building administration and building level committees should provide a different outcome. This path is probably not fast enough for the HHS committee, and maybe too fast for SHS. ERD responds that the HS principals and ERDs will meet in March to articulate what is tight/loose. ERDs what is tight: freshman entering HS in fall 2017 will receive clear communication that capstone projects will be a graduation requirement for the graduating class of 2021. ERD continues to explain that we are trying to use a different structure from using district committees for curriculum reviews, in an effort to include more faculty members in the conversation. That the structures for many educational decisions are being moved to the PLC level.
6. A teacher asks, are you coming back to teachers with that information. ERD responds, your principal will communicate with the teachers. The principal will be the voice for HHS at the March meeting. To help further shape the details. Parent clarifies, how ERD will communicate with the committee. She responds that your principal will be the communicator.
7. A teacher clarifies that when in the past year the district committee was assured by an ERD that because HHS and BSHS programs were already established, we would not have to start over. ERD responds that she cannot articulate what the conversations were at SHS which created the current situation, but she does recognize that the school board wants agreement between schools.
8. Parent comments the HHS committee must focus on how to proceed. Discussion as to how the pilot program from last year had “no teeth.” One teacher comments that I hear you say we can have teeth, by having an “expectation.” ERD says you can set the expectation but you will not be able to keep students from graduation if they have met all graduation current requirements. ERD comments that she has heard of the “incentive idea.” Parent comments that we are really stymied. A teacher proposes why can’t we just back off until it becomes a graduation requirement. Parent voices concerns that it will drop from the HHS culture. Teacher comments that we will never have 100% consensus. ERD explains that the board does not expect that, however there was enough descent voiced at the school board meeting to concern them. Discussion from several people on alignment, flexibility to each high school to create criteria specific to each high school program. Teacher restates, that was the task of the past district committee.
9. Chair asks for a redirection to clarify/summarize. Between now and 2017 it is up to the HHS Committee what capstone projects are going to look like at HHS. He suggests we use the last 10 minutes to clarify what support the administration will be able to provide in this effort. Teacher asks, how the district is going to provide FTE to help support capstone projects. ERD responds that the high school budget is all one budget. There are some district programs, (examples include agriculture, Arabic) and then we look and decrease/increases to the budget. Central office prioritizes the budget by what they hear from the building principals. Budget conversations have already started for next year. The current legislature has a possible effect on the budgeting process. A parent clarifies what if our HHS committee wants to have FTE from the district. ERD states that “we” are the district. That if you want to allocate budget in one area, it must come from another area. Principal responds that currently the only priority she has identified is a .5 increase for the business department for the Finance Academy. ERD states that she is also aware that the principal works with the department chairs to determine priorities.
10. Parent summarizes that this committee is back to how HHS is to allocate their budget. ERD responds that it will always be that way. For example if we identify HHS is to get an additional $50K then, HHS will have to determine where to allocate that $50K. Parent clarifies then if we, as a committee, determine to move forward with capstone project requirement (however we determine the accountability) that it will be moving toward the district goal of a graduation requirement.

Meeting adjourned: 4:00pm